INTER MIRIFICA: THE CHURCH AND THE MASS-MEDIA – FIFTY YEARS TOGETHER

*Cornel CADAR**

Riassunto: Tra i documenti emanati dal Concilio Vaticano II, si può identificare anche uno che tratta dell'importanza dei mezzi di comnicazione. Il documento Inter Mirifica vuole partire dalla Parola di Dio (cf. Mc 16,15) e costituirsi uno strumento a favore dell'evangelizzazione.
Il presente lavoro presenta il contenuto del documento conciliare, la storia della sua formazione e gli spunti che offre per la pratica pastorale della Chiesa.

Parole chiave: Inter mirifica, mass-media, evangelizzazione, Vatican II.

On December 4, 1963, the Second Vatican Council approved the *Inter mirifica* decree on the media of social communications, one of the most debated documents in the conciliar works. It is the first time that a Council treated and discussed the matter of the communications media focusing its attention on the world of social communication means. The *Inter mirifica* decree starts, as Pope Paul VI said, "an indication of the capacity of the Church to unite the interior and exterior life, contemplation and action, prayer and active apostolate..., exercise of the pastoral ministry and of the Catholic mission in the world".

The document has an evangelical text as point of reference. This is the text that will animate the Church's action along the centuries: "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature" (*Mark* 16:15). This is why we really do admire what technology meant in that time: the potential for evangelization of the press, radio, television, cinema.

Content

This is the shortest document of the Council. The introduction is followed by two chapters and a conclusion. The decree begins with the following words:

> Among the wonderful technological discoveries which men of talent, especially in the present era, have made with God's help, the Church welcomes and promotes with special interest those which have a most direct relation to men's minds and which have uncovered new avenues of communicating most readily news, views and teachings of every sort. The most important of these inventions are those media which, such as the press, movies, radio, television and

* Roman Catholic Diocese of Iassy (email: cornel@ercis.ro)

> the like, can, of their very nature, reach and influence, not only individuals, but the very masses and the whole of human society, such as the press, the cinema, the radio, television and others such and thus can rightly be called the "media of social communication".

In the introduction, the decree stresses the importance of the communications media, as well as the care and concern of the Church about the social communication media:

> The Church recognizes that these media, if properly utilized, can be of great service to mankind, since they greatly contribute to men's entertainment and instruction as well as to the spread and support of the Kingdom of God. The Church recognizes, too, that men can employ these media contrary to the plan of the Creator and to their own loss. Indeed, the Church experiences maternal grief at the harm all too often done to society by their evil use.

The first chapter, titled *Norms for the proper use of social communications media* includes 10 sub-chapters with the following titles: *Duties of the Church* (no. 3), *the Moral Law* (no. 4), *the Right to Information* (no. 5), *Art and the Norms of Morality* (no. 6), *Portrayal of Moral Evil* (no.7), *Public Opinion* (no. 8), *Special Responsibilities of Recipients* (no. 9), *Responsibilities of the Young and of Parents* (no. 10), *Responsibilities of Communicators* (no. 11) and *Responsibilities of the Civil Authorities* (nr. 12).

This first chapter develops the doctrine part and the morality part of the social communication media. The wonderful discoveries of tecnique that human genius has been able to extract from all created things are part of the creative and salvific plan; through them, on the one hand, man imitates God's creative activity and, on the other hand, participates in the spiritual development of mankind for the fulfillment of the supernatural destiny.

> The Catholic Church, since it was founded by Christ our Lord to bear salvation to all men and thus is obliged to preach the Gospel, considers it one of its duties to announce the Good News of salvation also with the help of the media of social communication and to instruct men in their proper use. It is, therefore, an inherent right of the Church to have at its disposal and to employ any of these media insofar as they are necessary or useful for the instruction of Christians and all its efforts for the welfare of souls. It is the duty of Pastors to instruct and guide the faithful so that they, with the help of these same media, may further the salvation and perfection of themselves and of the entire human family.

The part of the decree on morality is much more ample (no. 4-12), and it begins with the expression of a fundamental principle contained in number 4:

> For the proper use of these media it is most necessary that all who employ them be acquainted with the norms of morality and conscientiously put them into prac-

> tice in this area. They must look, then, to the nature of what is communicated, given the special character of each of these media. At the same time they must take into consideration the entire situation or circumstances, namely, the persons, place, time and other conditions under which communication takes place and which can affect or totally change its propriety. Among these circumstances to be considered is the precise manner in which a given medium achieves its effect. For its influence can be so great that men, especially if they are unprepared, can scarcely become aware of it, govern its impact, or, if necessary, reject it.

In this regard, here is what the decree mentions related to the responsibilities of the young and of parents:

> Those who make use of the media of communications, especially the young, should take steps to accustom themselves to moderation and self-control in their regard. They should, moreover, endeavor to deepen their understanding of what they see, hear or read. They should discuss these matters with their teachers and experts, and learn to pass sound judgements on them. Parents should remember that they have a most serious duty to guard carefully lest shows, publications and other things of this sort, which may be morally harmful, enter their homes or affect their children under other circumstances.

The second chapter titled *The media of social communications and the Catholic apostolate* includes practical advice for the spiritual pastors and lay people, special directives for the printing press, cinema, radio, television and theater, for the training organisms of specialists and public recipients, urges for the material support for all projects on the media of social communications, recommendations for all dioceses worldwide to celebrate every year a day dedicated to the media of social communications, to establish national media offices to cooperate with the media international associations.

In the conclusion part, the decree promisses a practical instruction:

> So that the general principles and norms of this sacred Synod with respect to the media of social communications may be put into effect, by the express will of the Council, the office of the Holy See mentioned in Number 19 should undertake, with the assistance of experts from various countries, to issue a pastoral instruction.

Voting History

The media at that time did not represent a matter that attracted the attention of bishops. Discussing about the press, radio and television, the last one to arrive among the mass communication means, in a meeting the agenda of which comprised broad ecclesiastical and doctrinal themes, was for many inappropriate. John XXIII was the one who included the theme on the Council agenda.

During the Council preparation phase (the first consultation carried out by Pope John XXIII in June 1959), more than 9348 proposals were debated in depth by the Council, but only 18 expressly referred to the media. Only in the end a media and entertainment secretariat was created within the preparatory committee in order to assist the journalists. On June 5, 1960 the secretariat became an official committee with the task of preparing a document on the media of social communications for the Council. With 46 members from 22 nations, the committee worked from November 1960 until May 1962 to prepare a schema with 114 paragraphs, all of which received the approval of Pope John XXIII, and thus formed a document which was subsequently included within the Acts of the Council. This text was then discussed by the Council Fathers towards the end of the First Session of the Council (23 to 27 November 1962). The tone of the 41 interventions is maintained at the pastoral level, avoiding the problems that appeared to be of a professional nature. At the end of the meeting, on November 27, following deliberations and whilst suggesting that the pastoral guidelines should be revisited later, the proposal to approve the document in principle was heartily approved with 2,138 Fathers voting in favour, only 15 against and 7 abstentions. In between the first and second plenary session of the Council, beside the shortening from 114 to only 24 paragraphs (from 40 pages to 9), the document was also reduced in its ranks from a constitution to a decree. Before the final vote on December 4, 1963, the document received harsh criticism, being considered unworthy of being a Conciliar Document (there was concern that it was lacking from a theological point of view) and not meeting the expectations of the media professionals. The vote on November 24, 1963 expressed this concern as it recorded the highest number of negative votes for any proposed Conciliar Document: 503 votes against, with 1,598 votes in favor and 11 abstentions. Nevertheless, in the final vote on December 4, in the presence of Pope Paul VI, this negative reaction has diminished to 164 votes *non placet*. The Council Fathers who voted *placet* were 1,960. Cardinal Pericle Felici read the vote outcome before the Holy Father Paul VI on December 4 at 11.16, after having announced the following results for the *Sacrosantum Concilium* Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy: 2,147 votes *placet* and 4 votes *non placet* at 11.05.

	voters	placet	non placet	juxta modum	nule
23-27.XI.1962	2.160	2.138	15		7
11-14.XI.1963	2.168	1.832	92	243	1
	2.126	1.893	103	243	5

24.XI.1963	2.112	1.598	503	125	11
4.XII.1963	2.124	1.960	164		

The document displeased everyone. The progressist for its censored language and an ingenue anthropology. Traditionalists were not happy with it because of the lack of explicit convictions and the openness considered excessive to some dangerous tools for the morality and integrity of Catholic faith[1].

Importance. The reception of the document

Despite the general dissatisfaction, this document did open a new path.

It is unquestionable that the conciliar assembly marked the beginning of the modern era of the Church in the media field and that *Inter mirifica* is the most significant of all the successive magisterial interventions.

In 1975, Pope Paul VI resumes the theme of the social communication media in *Evangelii nuntiandi*. He speaks of tools or means of social communication. This instrumental vision will accompany the Church up to the time of John Paul II:

> Nevertheless the use of the means of social communication for evangelization presents a challenge: through them the evangelical message should reach vast numbers of people, but with the capacity of piercing the conscience of each individual, of implanting itself in his heart as though he were the only person being addressed, with all his most individual and personal qualities, and evoke an entirely personal adherence and commitment[2].

In *Cristifideles laici,* social communications are defined as *a new frontier* in the mission of the Church[3]. *Redemptoris missio* (1990) of John Paul II marks a leap of perception. Instrumental reading is not abandoned, but the cultural valence is perceived: "The first Areopagus of the modern age is the world of communications, which is unifying humanity and turning it into what is known as a "global village"[4].

As St. Paul in the Areopagus of Athens, the Church sees the new world of communications as a major challenge to which it must respond. It is not enough to use these means in proclaiming the message of the Gospel and the Magisterium of the Church, but the message itself must be integrated

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[1] Cf. Emile Gabel, "Introduction. Decret sur les moyens de communication sociale «Inter mirifica»", in *Concile Oecumenique Vatican II. L'Église dans le monde, L'apostolat des laics, La liberte religieuse, Les moyens de communication sociale,* Éditions du Centurion, Paris 1966, 383-376.

[2] Paul al VI-lea, *Evangelii nuntiandi,* no. 45.

[3] Ioan Paul al II-lea, *Cristifideles laici,* no. 44.

[4] Ioan Paul al II-lea, *Redemptoris missio,* no. 37.

in this new culture created by modern communications. Thus, with John Paul II we reach the perception that the new technologies give rise to a new culture; they exchange and interfere with human life. Today, we are talking of a digital culture that is becoming a challenge to which the Church must respond. In a conference in 2013, Msgr. Claudio Maria Celli stated: "When I have a free moment, I picture myself with a good book in hand or listening to good music. But a young man, when he has free time, he is in front of a computer screen. And a young man spends hours in front of the computer"[5].

We do not evangelize using the internet, but we are called to evangelize over the internet, by living there. The Magisterium of the Church speaks of people who live in this reality where we can find millions of people today.

The next step – during recent years – is that we are not just talking about a living environment, but this environment is becoming a network through which we communicate, we produce cultural contents, we build and express our identity and convey values. It is both a challenge and an opportunity. One billion two hundred million people live in a large social network, Facebook. They have the right and we have the duty to announce the Gospel to them.

So, after more than fifty years from its promulgation, in light of the prodigious development of social communications, *Inter Mirifica* has even more the value of a prophetic text[6]. This this document *marks the definite end of a past of defense from and misunderstanding of* modern communications. The relationship between the Church and the media has not always been smooth. It is only in the twentieth century, "the media century", that this relationship changed and became more serene and positive[7].

Inter mirifica clearly defines the right to information and acknowledges the necessary place the media should have in the pastoral plan and evangelization.

Naturally, the communication tools in the service of the Holy See existed before as well. A Pope who leads and teaches is himself a communicator. In the twentieth century, when the cinema, radio, television and the Internet developed, the first encyclical letter *Vigilanti cura* (June 29, 1936) appeared, written by Pius XI, which focuses specifically on the cinema and the pasto-

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[5] "Conferenza di Mons. Claudio Maria Celli sui 50 anni del documento Conciliare Inter mirifica", Barcelona, November 18, 2013, at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9olSUtl-fAF8, accessed on November 20, 2014.

[6] Colin B. DONOVAN, "Vatican II, 40 Years Later: Inter mirifica", at http://www.catholic-culture.org/culture/library/view.cfm?recnum=4713, accessed on November 20, 2014.

[7] Roberto GIANNATELLI, "Inter mirifica: 40 anni dopo. Un cammino di avvicinamento", at http://www.usminazionale.it/12-2003/giannatelli.htm, accessed on November 20, 2014.

ral benefits it can offer. On September 8, 1957, Pope Pius XII publishes the *Miranda prorsus* encyclical letter, which speaks about the cinema, radio and television. During the Council preparation works, this encyclical letter together with two speeches of Pope Pius XII constituted resources for the working committees. The drafting of the *Inter mirifica* decree also included words fom the *Miranda prorsus* encyclical letter.

But earlier in the 16th century, the printing press was invented; in the 19th century the Italian newspaper *L'Osservatore Romano*; in the 20th century, the Vatican Bookstore and Publishing House, the Vatican Radio and Film Library. Following the Council, the Vatican Television Center was created and recently, as a result of the multimedia technological revolution, the Internet Office.

In the direction started off by the *Inter mirifica* encyclical letter, John Paul II's pontificate, who was a great communicator, subsequently developed the Magisterium up to last apostolic letter, *The rapid development of technology*, almost a prophetic record for his successor in order not to lose the experience gained during the 27-year pontificate and implemented during the *sede vacante* days, which reaffirmed the importance of all the Vatican communication institutions called to cooperate in the evangelizing mission that extends to the ends of the earth. A communication in the service of communion in the Church and in the whole family of peoples[8].

New at the level of approach, as that document is not only addressed to Catholics, but to all communication workers and "public opinion makers and shapers", the *Inter mirifica* decree oriented and shaped the structure of ecclesial communications and of the Vatican ones, in particular, that reaches out from the heart of the Church into all four cardinal points. Indeed, the Conciliar event favored a new coordination of Vatican communications. The Commission for the Cinema, Radio and Television that existed already turns into a body involved in all communications becoming as of June 28, 1964 the Pontifical Commission of Social Communications, and as of July 28, 1988, the Pontifical Council for Social Communications. And with the documents produced by this commission, especially with the two instructions "Communio et Progressio" (March 23, 1971 – *magna charta* of Catholic communicators) and "Aetatis nove" (22 February 1992), it has translated the principles expressed in the *Inter mirifica* decree at the pastoral level and with new insights: social communications as a road of communion and the importance of public opinion in the Church. It emphasizes the admiration that the Church has for the enormous progress made in the

[8] Roberto GIANNATELLI, "Inter mirifica: 40 anni dopo. Un cammino di avvicinamento".

field of social communications and its trust in the service that these powerful means can bring to humans and to the Gospel[9].

The Council's experience leads to a more direct confrontation with the world of information. The Press Room was officially created in 1966. Since then, the relationship between the Vatican and journalists from around the world has become a more open and continuous dialogue.

Social communications obtained a stable institutional framework. The *Inter mirifica* decree recommended the establishment of national offices for social communications (no. 21) and the international coordination of Catholic initiatives (no. 22), while professional associations UCIP (press), OCIC (cinema), UNDA (radio) already existed, recognized by the Holy See (today UCIP and SIGNIS). Moreover, *Inter mirifica* sets out that the World Communications Day be celebrated the Sunday after the Ascension Day (no. 18) "on which the faithful are instructed in their responsibilities in this regard". Believers are asked to pray and financially contribute to the Church's social communications initiatives. Every year, from 1967, on this day, the Popes send a message to Catholics, in which they address different aspects of social communications[10].

Furthermore, the reception of the document is also proven by the introduction in the new Code of Canon Law of 1983, of canons on social communications and various other initiatives originated by the Council: the DECOSA-CELAM opera in Latin America, the involvement of Jesuits, Paulins and other religious orders in this sector, the Pontifical Faculty of Social Communications, as the one created within the Salesian University in Rome on occasion of the first centenary of the death of Saint John Bosco (1988) for the of training of academics within the Catholic Church, Catholic radios and televisions, the preparation in the field of social communications within seminars and training institutes for monks[11].

Reception of the document in the Diocese of Iasi

The documents of the Second Vatican Council became known only later in Moldova because of the communist regime. The relationship between the Diocese and the media was weakened[12]. Only the wall calendar was printed in few copies, as well as several prayer books or catechisms. Catho-

[9] "Inter mirifica: 50 years of attention and misunderstanding between the Church and media", at http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Inter-Mirifica:-50-years-of-attention-and-misunderstanding-between-the-Church-and-media-26528.html, accessed on November 20, 2014.

[10] Roberto Giannatelli, "Inter mirifica: 40 anni dopo. Un cammino di avvicinamento".

[11] Roberto Giannatelli, "Inter mirifica: 40 anni dopo. Un cammino di avvicinamento".

[12] For this subchapter, information from Cornel Cadar, *Mass-media în Dieceza de Iaşi*, in „Dialog teologic", 4th year no. 12/2003, p.198-223 has been summarized and updated.

lic believers had no choice but to rummage through the attic and read again the old copies of the "Lumina creştinului" and "Viața" magazines. Many listened to Radio Vatican.

After 1990 new perspectives appeared. On May 19, 1992, the "Presa Bună" Publishing and Printing House in Iaşi officially reopened. After that, other publishers reopen or are set up: "Serafica" (1993), "Sapientia" (2000), that of the Divine Word Missionaries (1993). Numerous books start to be published and publications reappear or new ones are created: *Lumina creştinului* (1990), *Isus, prietenul copiilor* (1991), *De la Răsărit până la Apus* (1998), *Buletin istoric* (2000), *Almanahul „Presa Bună"* (1993), *Calendarul romano-catolic* (1994), *Agenda liturgică* (1993), *Mesagerul sfântului Anton* (1994), *Dialog teologic* (1998) etc.

The Press Day (the Sunday before Pentecost Solemnity) comes every year with new initiatives.

There is a cooperation with laic mass media through permanent articles or columns in the cities of Iasi, Bacau, Roman, Piatra Neamt etc. The contact with the laic media is maintained through: press releases, collaborations with articles, news, recordings, positive answers to invitations in radio and television broadcasts, Mass broadcasting on various occasions…

As of March 26, 2006, the Sunday Mass is broadcasted on Radio Iaşi (as of 2008, Mass celebrations on holy days as well) on AM 1053 KHz and over the internet. Every Sunday from 9.15am to 10.00am, Radio Iasi also broadcasts a religious activity (with different titles: *Gânduri creştine, Pelerinaj, Lumina credinței*): Catholics have a broadcasting time of 5 to 10 minutes. Since September 2012, "Lumina credinței" is also broadcasted every Friday, between 8pm and 9pm.

The Romanian Television Studio in Iasi inaugurated on Easter day, Sunday, March 31, 2013, a new show titled "Lumina creştinului", which is broadcasted every two weeks.

On November 21, 2009, the Radio Maria studio was open in Iasi, located in the basement of the "Blessed Virgin Mary – Queen of Heaven" Roman Catholic Cathedral of Iasi. The Radio Maria periodically broadcasts celebrations of Masses in the Diocese of Iasi, as well as other activities.

On May 12, 2002, the website of the Diocese of Iasi was officially launched: www.ercis.ro. Later on, various parishes, associations and religious congregations presented themselves via their websites. As of June 1, 2011, the Diocese of Iasi also has a facebook account (facebook.com/ercis.ro), its own channel on youtube.com, at the address www.youtube.com/ercis.ro and a twitter account at www.twitter.com/ercisro.

The website www.pastoratie.ro was officially launched on December 14, 2006. It is a Catholic website which aims to gather and put together materials useful for the pastoral work.

The challenges of the *Inter mirifica* decree

There are a few questions we should ask ourselves together with Roberto Giannatelli[13], starting from the *Inter mirifica*[14] decree, which are also valid for the people in the Diocese of Iaşi.

1. *Inter mirifica* has introduced the word communication in the agenda of the Church today: have we effectively introduced it in the pastoral ministry and formation? Mons. John Foley, former president of the Pontifical Council for Social Communications, during a congress stated that the formation of priests and monks remained a dream kept in a box.

The pastoral instruction *Communio et progressio* mentiones:

> If students for the priesthood and religious in training wish to be part of modern life and also to be at all effective in their apostolate, they **should know how the media work** upon the fabric of society and **the technique of their use**. This knowledge should be an integral part of their ordinary education. Indeed without this knowledge an effective apostolate is impossible in a society which is increasingly conditioned by the media... It is also desirable that priests and religious **understand how public opinion and popular attitudes come into being** so that they can suit both the situation and the people of their time. They can find the media of great help in their effort to announce the Word of God to modern men. Students who show a special gift in the handling of the media should be given higher training[15].

2. What do we do to promote the education of young people in social communications? This is a significant point in *Inter mirifica* (no. 16). The Church responds to the media "power" with the "compensating power" of education, with the formation of critical recipients and of responsible citizens. What are the schools doing? A media education curriculum must be promoted in schools, during which students would learn "to read and write" with the media (photography, radio, television, newspapers, internet).

3. The church is moving towards the means of social communications, but not our catechesis? The new languages of catechesis… To communicate faith by using photography, video, comics, theater, music and also using multimedia.

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[13] Salesian, president and founder of the Faculty of Social Communications of the Salesian Pontifical University, coordinates the "Intermed" magazine and lectures on topics of media education and social communications ministry.

[14] Roberto GIANNATELLI, "Inter mirifica: 40 anni dopo. Un cammino di avvicinamento".

[15] *Communio et progressio*, no. 111.

Finally, the “construction site” of social and pastoral communications is open. We are searching for workers. Who will get involved?

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